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National Assembly for Wales

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into: Public Libraries

Response from: The Open University



## **Open University in Wales - Response to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee inquiry into Public Libraries.**

### **About The Open University in Wales**

1. The Open University (OU) was established in 1969, with its first students enrolling in 1971. It is a world-leader in providing innovative and flexible distance learning opportunities at higher education (HE) level. It is open to people, places, methods and ideas. It promotes educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential.
2. Over 8,000 students across Wales are currently studying with The Open University, enrolled on over 11,000 modules. There are OU students in every National Assembly for Wales constituency and we are the nation's leading provider of part-time higher education. More than three out of four Open University students are in employment while they study and with an open admissions policy, no qualifications are necessary to study at degree level. Over a third of our undergraduate students in Wales join us without standard university entry level qualifications.
3. In 2013, for the ninth successive year, The Open University was top in Wales for 'overall student satisfaction' in the National Student Survey. As a world leader in education technology, our vast 'open content' portfolio includes free study units on OpenLearn (including many Wales-related materials) and substantial content on YouTube and on iTunesU where we have recorded over 60 million downloads.

### **Response to the inquiry**

4. The Open University in Wales works in partnership with libraries across Wales to promote opportunities to participate in informal and accredited learning opportunities. We run a variety of events in libraries aimed at those who may want to study with us or who wish find out more about what the OU has to offer. These include:
  - Drop-in advice sessions with our tutors for people thinking about OU study. This includes the opportunity to find out about the subjects and courses we offer, financial aspects of study including financial support, and how OU study works.
  - Information sessions about the free, online study opportunities provided by the OU.
  - Taster sessions and workshops about particular courses.
5. The OU in Wales values this partnership and in particular the community reach of local libraries. It enables us to offer face to face information about adult learning often in areas where it might be difficult for adults to engage in Higher Education. The OU in Wales currently offers around 80 advice and learning events a year at libraries across Wales.

6. This work forms part of our widening access strategy which seeks to open up educational opportunities to those who may not normally be able to access them. Currently 22% of our students come from Communities First areas.
7. Libraries also play a vital role in offering informal learning opportunities through free access to the internet. Our free online learning resources such as OpenLearn can be accessed through these community bases and through our work with libraries we encourage people to use these resources to start their learning journey.

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